

# Indian Culture An End of the Century View

*Kappen Memorial Lecture*



**U.R. Anantha Murthy**  
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AN END OF THE CENTURY VIEW  
Kappen Memorial Lecture

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The Quest for a Cosmopolitan: Locating Kappens  
Memorial Lecture

**U.R. Anantha Murthy**

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Indian Culture: An End of the Century View

*Visthar*

Bangalore

## **Indian Culture: An End of the Century View**

**U.R. Anantha Murthy**

**Visthar**

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*We are grateful to all those who participated in the Kappen memorial meeting, especially the speaker Professor U.R.Anantha Murthy. We particularly acknowledge the contribution of Prof. N. Manu Chakravarthy, NMKRV College, Bangalore and Professor S. Narayanan, Head of the Department of English, Sri. Kongadiyappa College, Doddaballapur, in editing the lecture for publication.*

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# The Quest for a Counterculture : Locating Kappen's Search for Alternatives

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## The Quest for a Counterculture : Locating Kappen's Search for Alternatives

Friends, welcome to the 3rd Kappen Memorial lecture! The first memorial lecture was delivered by the late Dr. M. M. Thomas on the theme, THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES. The second one was by Dr. Shobha Raguram on RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT, which we have published as a booklet and is available here for those interested. Today we are privileged to have Prof. Anantha Murthy with us to speak on INDIAN CULTURE : AN END OF THE CENTURY VIEW.

One of the main concerns of Kappen was the cultural challenges facing the people of India. He saw the process of social transformation as a transition "from inherited cultural bondages to freedom for fashioning a new, humane and humanizing culture". He believed that a new social order could be brought about only by those individuals and groups who play the role of prophets, who protest against oppressive systems, who dare to dissent and usher in a counter-culture. "For, dissenting behaviour is precisely what signals and provokes change. What is revolution but organized dissent?" wrote Kappen in *Negations*, a journal of culture and creative praxis edited by him.

"The subversion of the existing culture has for its reverse side the creation of a counter-culture. For, every negation is an affirmation. When the sculptor chops off pieces from a block of wood he is performing an act of negation, but by the same process he is creating something new, a work of art. So it is with the subversion of a cul-

ture". "The subversive-creative praxis take concrete forms in political as well as cultural action - action aimed at challenging the cultural hegemony of the ruling classes and restoring to the common people the right to think their own thoughts and frame their own scale of values. Since economic and political institutions are also expressions of ideas and values, such action will have consequences extending to society as a whole". Kappen suggests criticism and aesthetic creation as forms of cultural action. In his view, "The main target of criticism will have to be the separation of religion from social ethics and the divisive culture of caste." In his book JESUS AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION Kappen laments that all religions have betrayed the genuine insights that gave birth to them and have put fetters on the human mind.

Kappen suggests the dialectic of transgression (of suppression, preservation and sublimation) as a tool in projecting the future. He urges that the future cannot be created on the total rejection of the past nor can it be built with revivalism with its nostalgia for the mythical golden age. 'We need to construct a model incorporating the genuine values of our tradition. For only a society with deep roots in the past can promote true creativity. Unless the past is radically reinterpreted with a view to releasing its creative energies, the Indian religious tradition will continue to be an opium of the masses,' wrote Kappen in his article titled "The Materialistic Conception of History and the Indian Religious Tradition" (*Negations*, 1983).

For transformative action, we must listen to the call of the present - the present that sums up the past and is pregnant with the future. Often Kappen calls our attention to the importance of adequate social analysis as an essential precondition for social action. Social activists, artists, writers, and academics of various persuasions regularly participated in the Socialist Forum convened by him in Madras during the 1980s.

According to Kappen, no worthwhile strategy for change can emerge if we ignore the dialectic of psycho-structure and social structure, on the one hand, and the dialectic of the conscious and the unconscious, on the other. He highlighted the need for a revolution of the unconscious, individual and collective. While recognizing

the need for the analysis of social structures, Kappen warned us against all approaches that reduce persons to structures, ignoring human creativity and freedom.

The culturescape of today is characterised by “...the debasing of language into a means for commodity exchange; the harnessing of science to profit-making ..., the quantification of the human sciences and the cult of the statistical individual; the co-opting of art and artists in the service of Transnational Corporations, the commoditisation of women, the use of religion as a means for legitimizing unjust structures; the morality of individualism and private interest; the glorification of aggression and military might; and the regimenting and manipulation of human needs. A radical critique of these processes is a prerequisite for projecting a new culture of free self-creation.”

In Kappen’s view, “Creation differs from mere production. Production issues in commodities for use; creation, on the other hand, lets the deepest meaning of life appear in bodily shape. Meaning may body forth in stone, wood, colour, tone, bodily movement, or word. In other words, in architecture, sculpture, carving, printing, music, dance and literature. These are not mere luxuries but an essential revelation of humanness. They reveal the wealth and poverty, the power and the glory of human existence. They tell not merely what the human community is but also what it must become if it is to realize its authentic possibilities. Their appeal reaches down to the subliminal realm of the unconscious. That is why they have the power to galvanize people.”

Kappen saw revolution of symbols as an urgent need of our times. Humans cannot live meaningfully and creatively without symbols. By the onslaught of science and technology and the realisation that humans are the subject of history, the magico-mythical, religious symbols are on the way out, leading us to a crisis of symbols.

He emphasised the need to “fashion a new universe of symbols opening out to a new oneness and wholeness. A cosmic oneness founded not on human subjection to nature but on his/ her being the bestower of meaning on things given and things made, a oneness with the

human kind deriving not from the domination of the many by the few but from a free association of persons. Tomorrow's will have to be symbols not of fate but of freedom, not of conformity but of self-created, not of resignation but of hope. Their breeding ground will be the struggle of the masses for richer and fuller life. Only such men and women can create them as have the courage to dissent; never those who think to orders from above nor professional revolutionaries. The new universe of symbols will be the work of dissenting writers, poets, and artists who feel with the masses and are radically honest to the pure urge for creation." (Negations 1982)

In one of his last articles titled "*Towards an Alternative Cultural Paradigm*" Kappen dwells in detail on the cultural prerequisites for an alternative model of development. He wrote, "Culture must body forth not only into the political organisation of society and into specifically culture pursuits but also into the production, circulation and consumption of commodities. Every aspect of our economic life must bear the signature of our culture. The right to alterity and culture identity must be affirmed as a fundamental human right. Hence the historic challenge to fight the homogenising cultural imperialism". (Tradition, Modernity, Counter Culture: An Asian Perspective 1994)

Friends, we have gathered here as people committed to subversive-creative praxis, committed to resistance and the creation of alternatives. And I hope our time together will inspire and sustain us in our journey towards a new world.

The meeting will be chaired by Prof. Manu Chakravarthy – Professor of English at the NMKRV College, a literary critic and well known writer who has been contributing regularly to mainstream publications on issues related to culture.

Welcome, friends, once again and thank you for coming. I specially thank Prof. Ananatha Murthy for accepting our invitation and being with us this evening.

## **Mercy Kappen**

Visthar, Bangalore,  
Feb. 15, 1997

# A Creative Writer's Negotiations between Tradition and Modernity

## An Introduction to U.R. Anantha Murthy

Friends, while trying to introduce somebody like Prof. Anantha Murthy, I shall not resort to the usual cliché that he needs no introduction, or the platitude, that a distinguished man like him can do without one. My own feeling is that he does need an introduction, which I offer you in my own way. I shall only try to place the "being" of the works of Prof. Anantha Murthy in the initial phase of my introduction. The first introduction I would offer of him, and the most significant one in my opinion is that, considering the many crises that a post colonial society like India faces, Professor Anantha Murthy has never upheld any view that could be categorised as one that belongs to the area of "political correctness". The pressures that societies like India confront push people, especially important thinkers, to embrace certain ideas that enter the boundaries of "political correctness". For people like me, and many of my generation, the fact is that Anantha Murthy has always challenged political correctness especially in crucial areas of caste and tradition. In this sense many of us look upon him as a very important loner in our cultural situation. In the Karnataka cultural context, especially between the sixties , and eighties, Anantha Murthy stood alone and challenged the dominant positions taken up by many who were - and are still - recognised as "progressive modernists". Today I see the vindication of the position that Prof. Anantha Murthy held then in the form of the changed opinions of many modernists who embody the position that he has been working out for almost three decades

now. I just want to cite an example. Lankesh, a critic of Anantha Murthy on very crucial issues relating to caste and religion at an intellectual level now seems to be, as his creative work “Ullangane” reveals, realising the value of Anantha Murthy’s long held position.

An important aspect of Anantha Murthy’s creative process is the mode of “juxtaposition”. If on one hand he offers rationalism as one of the possible alternatives for our social tensions, on the other hand, on an equal footing, he also makes us turn to the mystical traditions of people like Narayana Guru, Sri. Ramakrishna, Ramana, Akka, Basava, and Allama. This constant “juxta position” when internalised properly does not let us move to extreme isolated positions that would perhaps appear to many as very progressive . In my opinion the struggle to give up binary opposition is very vital to understanding the of our traditional past. In that sense I have always looked upon him as one of our very important writers in the post Colonial period who has given life to Blake’s vision of contraries making for progression. So, at one level to combat obscurantism we use reason, while at another, to escape the dangers of extreme reason we move into the mystical traditions. “Progression through contraries” is what many of us have learnt from Anantha Murthy. In fact, I just refer to two of his very significant stories to drive home this point - “Suryanakudure” and the latest story called “Bete Bale mathu Othiketha” “the hunt, the bangle and the chameleon”. Now , if you go through this story, you will notice that it is a challenge not merely to the notion of the aesthetics of the western kind but also to several notions of consciousness itself - a very valuable perception for people like us situated at this historical juncture. And in that sense the most important feature about Anantha Murthy is that even if you do not witness direct radical politics in him, in distinct terms, you certainly witness a very active radical cultural politics.

Many behold in Prof. Anantha Murthy a kind of duality. But I would much rather see that not as duality but a kind of open ambivalence - an ambivalence that makes traditionalists view him as anti-tradition, and the liberals to sense in him a revivalist position. And most certainly he is not any of these. It is my personal conviction

that it needs very great courage in a situation like ours to be ambivalent. It is easy to take up radical positions in a society like India, but to retain the nature, to sustain and to nourish the idea of ambivalence in everything, in every conscious step that you take as a very important spokesperson of the cultural community, requires much greater courage.

Another important part of this introduction, as far as I am concerned, relates to my life with Prof. Anantha Murthy as a student. For 10 years beginning with '75 till '84 when I moved to Bangalore, I almost literally sat at his feet imbibing all kinds of ideas. Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and the great German and French writers came to me as immediately as the Indian writers. Infact my own research area, initially, was shaped by Prof. Anantha Murthy and I owe him so much. I must draw attention to one important statement he made while I was a student which still remains in my mind and sustains me as a teacher. I recall his statement, "Never mark anybody, especially a student, for performance. Mark students for their potential". He would always tell us that performance was for the moment, it would get located, whereas potential was something that would keep blossoming. Most of us as teachers and more significantly as human beings have been guided by this profound piece of advice, built on compassion and understanding

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It is a matter of great indebtedness, a kind of intellectual and spiritual allegiance, that we owe a person like Prof. Anantha Murthy. Today, in the context of globalisation, if there is anything else that we look forward to from Prof. Anantha Murthy, it is the kind of activism that has begun now in him especially in relation to what is happening in Dakshina Kannada with the emergence of the Cogentrix. So, friends, it is a matter of honour and privilege to introduce Prof. Anantha Murthy, the writer, and more importantly, a teacher who has shaped so many lives. I end this introduction with the hope that from today Prof. Anantha Murthy will mark yet another phase in his life - a phase of activism which I think has enveloped him intensely. Thank you very much. Now I call upon Prof. Anantha Murthy to deliver the third Kappen memorial lecture.

**N. Manu Chakravarthy**

## Indian Culture An End of the Century View

I felt truly very happy to hear Manu speak about me because like all other writers I also need to be reassured that I am reaching the listener. I have got that reassurance from one of my most intelligent students and I am grateful to him for that.

I met Fr. Kappen, that is how I called him, in Kottayam for the first time. Prof. Dayakrishna, a great philosopher and a very original thinker, had once asked me to invite a Greek philosopher from Cambridge and to arrange a dialogue between him with some good minds who were available in Kerala. Since I had read a few things written by Fr. Kappen I invited him too. He was not keeping good health at the time, but I was immediately impressed by the quality of his mind which had not just intellectual brilliance, but something coming from the soul of the man, if I may use the word. He was like a Rishi and had the courage to stand up, alone, and say what he truly felt. Never did he seem to want to impress anyone with what he knew. This was his most enduring trait. I am very grateful to John for giving me Fr. Kappen's book "Tradition Modernity, Counterculture - an Asian Perspective" that Visthar has published. It is, I think a very valuable book. Whatever I say today is in a way related to what I find in this book as well as what Mercy Kappen spoke just now.

I would like to talk now about the dilemmas we face in responding to our own culture. What happens is that - I am sure this happens to many others too- the moment I begin to talk to a very orthodox,

traditional man or woman in our culture I find myself taking an antagonistic position, a position that is very critical of our traditional notions, very critical of orthodoxy, then I begin to wonder whether I have become a modernist. Of course, to a certain extant, I have become a modernist. But when I meet a Eurocentred modernist I see that I begin to take a position that is closer to orthodoxy and tradition, the position I was critical of the other day.

The world appears to be divided between revivalists and modernists. The revivalists are insensitive to injustice, inequality, and the meaningless superstitions in our culture. When you begin attacking them you find yourself taking the modern European rationalist position. But European rationalism is itself quite insensitive to larger questions, and insensitive to other ways of knowing and being. This, in short, is the shape of our dilemma. In this situation it becomes very difficult for anyone to be truthful to one's own vision, living as we are in a divided culture.

In the fifties and sixties, when I was growing up I found another great problem. When you talked about politics or literature or culture, you were either branded as pro-American or as pro-Russian. This happened to many friends too, Prof. A.B. Shaw for example. People also became recipients, without their own knowledge, of patronage and funds from the CIA or KGB. There was the famous case of Stephen Spender who was running "Encounter" with CIA funds without realising it, as he confessed, until too late. He was actually fighting for East European writers, their freedom and was doing enormous good service. This was done, ironically, with CIA funds. Perhaps "Quest" was also funded by the CIA, without our knowledge. But look at the other side. Communist China and the Soviet Union were also funding a large number of organisations and individuals in a similar fashion. Moreover there were Indian writers - really fine writers - who went to the Soviet Union, stayed there a number of years, saw with their own eyes oppression and cruelty and fear and yet did not - dared not? - say a word against it all because they thought they had to stand by the principles of communism and social justice. They believed that even if there were lapses and acts of injustice in the Soviet Union, these could be condoned

and rectified but that they should not play into the hands of the enemy by being critical of these. Similarly there was a complete silence about American excesses in Vietnam. I even heard a very dear friend of mine, a person whom I respected, say that the war in Vietnam was justified because anti-democratic forces had to be curbed. If, as intellectuals and as people of culture, we are driven to take such positions it makes me pause and consider the strangeness of it all here in India.

If we take the case of India, now, we find that for the first time in our history we are conscious of living in a century, the 20th century, in European terms. Indians living in the 19th century, especially at its beginning, might not have been aware that they were in the 19th century - Europe's 19th century, that is. Whereas, the whole of Europe - be it Germany or France or Italy - was quite aware that it was in the 19th century. In India, at the beginning of the 19th century, we had our own, very different notion of the times and, therefore, we were not divided over an issue which was being fought out in Europe. However, today culturally we are all judged on the basis of what positions we take on issues which are fought elsewhere and not just those in our land. We are living in such a century and are nearing the end of it.

I was reading Kappen on Tradition and Modernity. He writes very, very sensitively about this and shows how both the traditional and the modernist position, taken at the extreme, can lead to a lot of insensitivity. The most dangerous thing that can happen today is that one can be modern and yet use the levers of power in a traditional fashion, as we see our politicians do very often. Our politicians know that they are living in the modern world but they use caste, religion and other traditional notions. Their front is modern, rational, European, but the levers of power are managed not by notions of equality, nor by notions of justice, but by very traditional notions. This is true of politics in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, almost every where. I found to my surprise that even Kerala was not free from that, although Kerala is a land where many of these battles for social justice have been well fought. Kerala which was doing class politics, was almost completely domi-

nated by caste politics. There was a Nair party, a Christian party, and an Ezhava party. Whereas in Karnataka Devaraj Urs was doing caste politics. But it turned into class politics. What was apparently caste politics had become class politics and what was class politics had become caste politics. What does this mean? What is the right attitude to tradition and to modernity? It is all so very confusing. Let us take a look at our century. While in the 50's and 60's it was possible for us to have a strong ideological foothold and take a firm position, now, as we are nearing the end of the century, that is no longer possible. The Emergency itself presented us with a problem. We thought we could rely on Gandhism and Gandhism was itself not clear enough to tell us what position to take when Indira Gandhi was assuming enormous power. We had one Gandhian J.P. Narayan, opposing it and another Gandhian, Vinobha Bhave, supporting it. Gandhism, in itself, was not clear enough, was not unequivocal in telling us what the right view was. Although Bhave later on withdrew his support to the Emergency, he did support it initially saying that it was an era of indiscipline. Indira Gandhi, who gladly took the support given by Bhave, was in no mood to listen to him when he wanted the emergency to end. When Gandhism, thus, was itself not very clear and could not properly guide us, we were not sure of what line to take especially as we saw Jayaprakash and Vinoba taking contrary stands.

Similar was the case with the Marxists. One group of Marxists supported it and another group opposed it. Marxism, therefore, as an ideology was not enough to tell us what was the correct line to take. In fact, no ideology in the 20th century has been morally, spiritually able to tell us what is right and what is wrong. Our conception of these has had to come from somewhere "within". Mere rationality and argument and ideas and analysis were not enough. But we thought these were enough. Marxists believed that Marxism was scientific and so could never go wrong. But it did go wrong. Now, Why and how did this happen? The reason, I think, is that when we have been rationalists we have not brought deeper spiritual concerns into operation. At the same time, when we have been spiritual we have not brought deeper political and economic factors into consideration. Hence both the traditional and the mod-

ernist arguments on many issues concerning us have been false from the beginning because there is no holistic view of the matter. In this context it is useful to think of Gandhi. Gandhi was constantly trying to offer a kind of alternative, to evolve, we might say, an alternative that would help us solve the problems of the 20th century. His seminal work "Hind Swaraj", a very important book, presents this alternative vision. Gandhi wanted Nehru to read it. Whether Nehru did so or not I do not know. Anyway Gandhi wrote a letter to Nehru before India became independent. He begins the letter, "Have you read my book, I wonder... I do not know whether I should write to you in Hindustani or in English." I still do not know whether he wrote it in Hindustani or English because I read it in English. Then Gandhi goes on to say that, unfortunately, Nehru has not taken the argument of "Hind Swaraj" into consideration. In "Hind Swaraj" we find Gandhi to be very critical of the concept of development; very critical of what we call the modern system. He thinks modern civilisation is sick, rather it is itself a sickness of which we have to be cured. Gandhi argues that the British are in India because we are in love with modern civilisation. He does not blame the British but blames ourselves. He goes on to argue that modern civilization is bad not only for us but for the British as well. Hence the struggle for liberation not only of India but of the British as well. This is radically different from the point of view of leaders like Tilak and writers like Bankim Chandra who wanted India to emerge a strong nation in the European mould. Bankim Chandra's book on Krishna is a very important book in which he argues that we do not need the mystical Krishna. What we need is the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* - a wily politician. We can then build ourselves into a strong force and then drive away the British. In a way, he wanted Indians to acquire some of the qualities of the British so that we could challenge them on their terms and drive them out. But the position taken by Gandhi was different. There was some hope then of a new kind of praxis appearing in India and Gandhi was trying this almost like a tantrik. Tantriks are those who want to make their ideas come into operation by employing some special techniques. Gandhi was a great tantrik that way. In whatever he said and did he was trying to bring an alternative mode of cultural action.

For Gandhi, the concept of the nation was a little suspect because it was people like Hitler and Mussolini who were talking in terms of a nation and propagating the ideal of nationalism. This nationalism was quite suspect for both Gandhi and Tagore, more so for Tagore who was a more radical critic of the idea of a nation. After all, Gandhi was a practical man. He had to find a suitable mode of struggle against British occupation and therefore sometimes did find the concept of the nation useful while mobilising the masses. But, on the whole, Gandhi's priorities were of a social character. He often said that he had three great ambitions: one was to end the practice of untouchability, the other two were to promote Hindu - Muslim unity and propagate the use of Charka-Khadi. If you go deep into it you see a man trying to evolve a civil society rather than a strong nation. It is actually this idea of a nation that has been the 20th century's greatest problem. What enabled the British stay in India? One was Hindu - Muslim disunity, the British could always say that since we were not united, they were here policing. So if Hindu-Muslim unity were to be achieved they could have no justification for policing the country. Secondly, untouchability. There is something rotten within the Indian system and unless others become radical critics of Hinduism, change it from within, Hinduism as a way of life will always be difficult, wrong and hence the need to end untouchability. And, finally, Khadi. Symbolically what Gandhi meant was that we did not want the modern kind of development that one saw in Europe, the love of which had made it possible for Britain to rule us. So we have to somewhere cure ourselves of that love for foreign goods. He also said , "not mass production, but production by the masses"! That again was the economic principle - no mass production, but production by the masses. But consider this. In the whole statement, there is not a single sentence where he says one of the ambitions of his life was transfer of power. You would expect any politician at that time to talk about the transfer of power. But Gandhi said his greatest ambition was to realise these three things, not transfer of power. Because transfer of power would automatically happen if these things happened. Thus the cultural praxis at that time for writers and politicians and political workers was determined by a very fine understanding of what makes for a truly democratic movement at the grass roots level. There were other forces at

work too and Gandhiji had to continuously work within a situation like that for the creation of what could be called a civil society rather than a strong nation.

Let me take another example. Our century begins with a very important debate: the debate between nation and society. Almost all the great minds of India were engaged in this debate. A great man like Ambedkar, and many others, argued that there was so much of social injustice in Indian society, of which caste system was a glaring example, that living in a village was hell for an untouchable. Ambedkar thought that it was imperative that a social revolution took place before the transfer of power as it was necessary for the lower castes to get out of the village. Ambedkar saw the transfer of power as transfer from the British to the Indian upper castes, leaving the average Indian in misery and oppression. Tilak, on the other hand, wanted freedom from foreign rule first. Becoming a strong nation was the first priority for him. Social revolution would follow automatically once we became independent. This was how the argument went on. Of course, I am simplifying it a bit just in order to understand the nature of the duality.

I began with the conflict between Modernity and Tradition. This haunted us throughout the century and the positions that Gandhi took was a unique one. He asked the British to quit India. He did invoke the idea of India as a nation, but a different kind of nation, a nation with a decentralised set up where there would be production by the masses but no mass-production. But, at the height of the national struggle against the British, he would call it off and demand that temples be opened to the untouchables. This baffled many freedom fighters, who thought that this man was dissipating the energy of the whole movement. To them it seemed that Gandhi was dividing the nation by taking up a social issue, after having united the whole nation against foreign rule. But, actually, Gandhi derived as much strength by dividing the nation as by uniting it, for, he thereby empowered the lower castes by such actions. He made them conscious of their rights. What Gandhi was trying to achieve was something unique. While the argument went on regarding which should come first — social change or national independence — here was a mode

of practice which didn't say what was first and what was second. Both were done together. Thus energies of both kinds were released.

But here we are now at a point where we do not know how to act within our society under globalisation so far as our tradition is concerned. Let me take my own example. I began writing as a modernist. Most of us writing in Indian languages developed our creativity by exposure to modern ideas and not by falling back on our tradition. On the other hand you had someone like Gandhi saying that the most creative minds in India would be those who were rooted in their soil and, at the same time, exposed to the ideas of the world. This might look contradictory but it is true as a writer needs both. If you are just exposed to the ideas of the world - just exposed - then you are likely to become a cosmopolitan intellectual. You can find them at all times. Gramsci speaks of the urban intellectuals and the rural intellectuals. The urban intellectuals are those who serve world forces or capitalist forces. You can always have intellectuals of that kind who are free with ideas. But if you are a man rooted in your culture, you are just rooted. When Gandhi went to Kerala for that great Satyagraha in the temple, he talked to the Namboodri Brahmins and the Nair leaders and found that they are totally deaf and blind to any modern idea or notion. But they were people rooted in their own culture. Gandhi had to fight them. Initially he tried to fight them with their own ideas, but when they proved implacable he had to declare a Satyagraha. Obviously, rootedness was not enough and openness again was just not enough too. One had to combine the two - rootedness and openness. This, I think, has happened with most of the writers in the regional languages.

I have often said - and it is worth saying it again - that the Indian (vernacular) languages have survived because the so-called backward people and the non-literate speak those languages. For a moment let us consider the situation in a city like Bangalore today. We find that the highly literate speak only in English. It is as if you know fewer languages the more literate you are. But a coolie in the bus stand in Mysore who may be illiterate is yet able to speak in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Urdu and Kannada. He may even understand some English. If you are a top level IAS officer, you can

do everything that you want to do only in English. Maybe his wife and children know a little of the local language because they have to go to the bazaar or play in the streets. Thus you have this strange situation — the more literate you are, the fewer are the languages you know.

Friends, let us for a moment pause and consider who the people are who have preserved our languages through the centuries? If, at any point of time, everyone in India had been literate, Sanskrit, most probably, would have been everyone's language, later to be followed by Persian and English. But our vernacular languages have survived because the masses speak these and not Sanskrit. And these masses are the carriers of our culture, of our great stories and epics. There is a story that the late A. K. Ramanujam was so fond of narrating. It reveals how in our mass culture and in the popular culture there is some strange kind of intertextuality. Although the people might not have read the text they are aware of the text. Take this example: There are a few thousand *Ramayanas* in Kannada, a thousand folk *Ramayanas*. They are not written down but they are all narrated. In one of the folk *Ramayanas*, this rural Sita argues with Rama before he goes to the forest. Rama says to Sita, "Don't come to the forest, you are a princess, your feet are very tender and you will be hurt. There are tigers and lions and snakes and you should not come". She argues, "No, I am your wife and I have to come." And when Rama persists, do you know what she says in the end? She says, "I know Sita goes to the forest in every *Ramayana*. How can you deny it to me". Obviously, this Sita was aware of the other *Ramayanas*. There is an intertexuality. They are all connected. As a matter of fact, India has two languages other than its thousands of languages - *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. They connect not only the intelligentsia of the country, but also the masses. Tulsidas or Ezhuthachan wrote for the masses and, as you know, Ezhuthachan also was a lower-caste man.

There are so many stories about Ezhuthachan in Kerala, fascinating stories. One is about his meeting with the great Namboodri poet, Bhattacharipad, who wrote in Sanskrit. This great Sanskrit Scholar does not know how to begin his *the Bhagawatha*. He does not know what metre to use, what form to adopt, etc. He is just a scholar

and the story as the Malayalees narrate it is interesting. You know in Kerala everyone begins a meal with a bite of the fish. So when Bhattathiripad asked Ezhutuachan, - "How do I begin?" "With fish", came the reply. This is said to a Brahmin, you see. What he means is, of course, Matsyavathar. He is to begin with Matsyavathar. That is the first avathar in *Bhagwatha*. Here is an instance of a very interesting cultural tale that tells you how a lower caste man like Ezhuthachan was able to set in motion a great Sanskrit epic. He had that creativity. There is another story concerning Bhattathiripad who often had pain in the joints. It seems he had refused to read a *Bhagawatha* written in Malayalam. Bhattathiripad, who had written his *Bhagawatha* in order to get cured of the pain in his body - and had actually got cured - now got the pain in his joints again as he refused to read the Malayalam *Bhagawatha*. Then God came to him and said, "You are preoccupied with Vibhakti and hence refuse to read the Malayalam *Bhagawatha*, whereas in it you have real Bhakti which is what you need". There are numerous such stories in Malayalam. And what they reveal is a certain upsurge of the culture of the masses through the Indian languages.

The 20th century has again seen the emergence of Indian languages and literary activity in these languages acting as carriers of both tradition and modernity. I began with my own example. The tradition that I am aware of is sort of almost unconscious, subconscious. Only when you use the language you get its verve, the strength of the language which comes from your memory. And if you have had a rural upbringing all memory of the rural life comes back to you. Let me tell you of an interesting experience. I was in England for nearly three years and had to speak English all the time. I often experience extreme fatigue speaking English. Once I went out with Martin Greene, a great Gandhian, and he took me up North. While travelling I would start talking to him in Kannada. As I went on talking I would suddenly become aware that he didn't know Kannada. But, because of this outburst, I wrote my novel 'Samskara' within a few days because all my language came back to me, thanks to my rural memories. I am giving you this example to show how the Indian cultural intelligentsia coming from a rural background and using one of the vernacular languages are like what Gramsci

speaks of, the rural intellectual, who is in a way dealing with both tradition and modernity. And it is in him that you find this duality, this dilemma because without tradition he would not have had his language to write, and without modernity, he would not be exposed to new ideas and would not be creative in new areas. The tension between the two is very intense. You find it in Bendre, Kuvempu, and Masti. You find it in all the great writers, this tension between Modernity and Tradition. And hence they carry a lot of the meanings of our times.

How do we resolve this tension between tradition and modernity without giving up either of them? At any particular moment I may sound anti-modern, but the next moment I know that the comforts I want, the books that I want to read, the people whom I want to talk to are those who are exposed to what is called Modernity. One becomes dishonest if one takes an extreme position. There are quite a few amusing tales about this. I shall relate one involving Gorur Ramaswamy Iyengar, a very fine orthodox looking writer in Kannada. He was a great Gandhian and looked very traditional. He told me once that whenever he met an English educated person, he would say, "what is there in English? You should read Kalidas, Bhasa, Bhavabhuti and the *Bhagwatha*". If he met a Sanskrit scholar, he would tell him, "It is not enough if you read only Sanskrit, you should read Shakespeare and other wonderful European writers". This is both amusing and interesting because, as I said earlier, one's position is determined by what one is speaking against.

Russian intellectuals in the 19th century were in a similar situation. They were torn between Westernisation and the love of Russia. They loved to live in Petersburg, but were also drawn towards Moscow which was the centre of Russian culture. Petersburg was the centre of urbanised European culture. Some of the greatest writings of the 19th century are products of this tension. When you read Tolstoy you realise that some of the characters are like rich Indian women. They speak to their children and husbands in French, not Russian. This is because using French is a way of showing that they are upper class and also a way of hiding from the servants the fact that they are quarrelling. In this respect, the Russians are very much like us.

This is how modernity and tradition come together in a tension. This has given birth to creativity. But this creativity itself can be often Eurocenteric. Look at the early novels in all the Indian languages. They are all so sick of tradition. The novelists are so angry and indignant about superstition and injustice. They are very 'rational'. It is as if they write not knowing that there is a Kumaravyasa, a Pampa, an Ezhuthachan, or that we have a great tradition. For them this tradition is not of any use at all. And a third rate British writer becomes a model. Not Shakespeare, mind you. This is because the urge to change one's society, to fight for social justice, to build a strong nation is derived from all types of very cheap European sources. When I was growing up the name of Ingersoll was bandied about. He was considered a great intellectual though I doubt if any American had ever heard of him. I was told in my village that I ought to read Ingersoll and Reynolds, the latter a third-rate novelist from Britain. Reynolds in those days was a big hero. I still remember those folios - two volumes. And they were all stories of Dukes and Duchesses, their love affairs and so on. Most of us who felt humiliated by the British felt very good that these dukes and duchesses had love affairs and had a lot of humbug in them. Reynolds was banned in England but was a model for us. This may seem strange but I believe that the first rush of modernity made us completely forget our tradition. Later we became aware of the strength of our tradition through Max Mueller. But even then our reaction was, "see, a European has translated our Vedas. They must be great because a European has translated them."

I do not think that we have even now, at the end of the century, truly resolved this tension between tradition and modernity. I believe we have lost something and this is the most crucial point to which I want to bring my argument. While living in Mysore I observed that the Ayyappa movement attracted almost all kinds of people. In particular I observed a Harijan, who I knew was a drunkard, who would beat his wife, suddenly turning devout, observing a 40 days vratha, living away from his wife in the midst of his friends and finally embarking upon this great pilgrimage to Sabarimala. His wife was happy that, atleast for 40 days, he would be a reformed man. When I asked her what would happen after he

returned , she would say “Oh, he will go back to his old ways, but anyway another Ayyappa Vratha will come next year.” She lived with that hope. I realised then that the Ayyappa Movement had all the qualities of the Bhakti Movement. Certain things are characteristic of Bhakti movements in general. One is congregation. You can find people coming together, singing and performing Bhajan. The other is abstinence from sex and liquor and such other things. The third is equality among men. Once you become an Ayyappa devotee, you become a swamy. There is no caste distinction here. Castes may exist outside, but for 40 days there are no separate castes. The Ayyappa movement seemed to me superficially to resemble a Bhakti movement. However, though I saw the movement was growing and though I became very curious, I could not feel myself to be a part of it. It struck me then that Indian history had been different in the past. We have always had Shramana movements in India, so have we had the Vaidika movement. It was in the 19th century that Matthew Arnold talked of European society being both Hebraic and Hellenic in character. Hebraic is the religious and Hellenic is the cultural, derived from Greek. Arnold argued that whenever there was excessive Hellenism, Hebraism would correct it and whenever there was an excessive religious puritanism Hellenism would correct it.

In India we too had a similar kind of, what I would call, truth confrontation. The Vaidika system which believed in getting more power from nature and making man equal to gods through Yagna or tapas existed along with Jainism, Buddhism and a lot of movements like the Veerashaiva Movement — where the shudras got involved. These movements were very intense, sometimes even extremist. Gandhi was a product of the Shramana movement in India. But no Shramana movement remains entirely that. A Vaidika element is always bound to be present in it just as a Vaidika movement is bound to have a Shramana element in it. This enabled India to correct itself as the Shramana and Vaidika elements came together notwithstanding the rigidities of the caste-system. I once heard, with surprise, a professor of History in Kerala say that the caste system was first questioned in India after the Portuguese arrived. The truth is that, as you all know, the caste-system was questioned first by the

Buddha and later on by Tukaram, Basava and Kabir. We have a number of saint-poets who belong to the Shramana tradition. There may be a lot of the Vaidika element too. Like the Hebraic and Hellenic they are not present in isolation. At any particular time, however, one of the two may be dominant. The point of my bringing in this question here is that inspite of a superficial resemblance the Ayyappa Movement is not a Bhakti movement. I can't respond to it as such. Compare it with the Dasa Movement and the movement of the Veerashaivas, the great Vachana movement. The Ayyappa movement has not produced great poetry inspite of Jesudas singing Ayyappa bhajans. It is crude. Its music is loud. It does not have those magnificent qualities which you see in the Bhakti movement which produced a Basava, an Allamma, a Tukkaram, a Kabir. The modern Bhakti Movement has not been able to do that. As a matter of fact it has been used by interested elements within each culture to present their own demands. You see, it has not only not had a good effect, it has also had the effect of using power for wrong reasons. I wrote at length about the Ayyappa movement sometime ago. My point is that the Vaidika and the Shramana have got separated in our century. Except during the period when Gandhi brought us all together, there has been no big movement in India which has brought the intellectuals and the common people together. There is no fusion of the two. I feel something has gone wrong somewhere. Indians, in general, have the tendency to convert every place into a place of pilgrimage. There is a place of pilgrimage in almost every village in Karnataka. A saint was born here, a Dasa there, they say. In North Karnataka, there are a number of places where one or the other Dasa is supposed to have been born. Then, why is it that for Indians Naokhali has not become a place of pilgrimage? After all Naokhali is no less important than the places where Buddha went. It was in Naokhali that a miracle took place when Gandhi walked barefoot to defuse the communal situation and overcome the distrust and hostility of the Muslims. He was, ofcourse, later killed by a Hindu. Gandhi worked tirelessly to assuage Muslim feelings and overcome hostility. It was such a great trial for him. But the Hindu mind has not taken Naokhali up as a place of pilgrimage. Our religious imagination has failed us inspite of Mahatma Gandhi being at its centre. The Indian religious imagination, if it had been affected by our sys-



tem, should have taken up the 15th of August and 26th of January as days of profound mourning. Unfortunately, they are considered merely as government holidays. They are events where Ministers come and go. Dasara used to be a great festival in Mysore. Ever since our Ministers started participating in it, it has ceased to be a festival. Somewhere the Shramana and the Vaidikas have got separated. What was Vaidika then is just upper caste or the ruling class now, in which I place Yadavas - Laloo Prasad and those like him who belong to the ruling class. They cannot be exonerated just because they are lower-caste people. They have actually nothing to do with the ordinary masses. Anyway there has been a total separation of the Vaidika and the Shramana which had previously interacted.

The Indian languages had been the languages of this interaction, not Sanskrit which was limited in its use. Certainly Buddha did not use it; he used the language of the common people. That is why I say, that the Indian languages are profoundly inter-textual in spirit.

The Indian languages, the languages of the masses, preserved through illiteracy, have digested Sanskrit, English, and in fact a part of Europe. You can see this in Tagore, in Tulsidas when he writes his Ramayana or Allama when he writes his Vachana and in the great Upanishads, in anything that cuts into the languages preserved by the masses. So in a way the Shramana and the Vaidika came together and got resolved. But today they are not getting resolved.

Finally we come to the question of globalisation. This is how the century is ending. Gandhi, as I said earlier, tried to evolve a civil society, not a strong nation as in Europe. He knew that it would be difficult for us to build a nation of the European kind. A European nation has one language, one religion and one culture. India is different given its diversity, and any attempt to build a nation of the European kind here is bound to fail. We have to accept plurality and then we will be a nation - a nation with a difference. These pluralities are of vital importance. There shall be no attempt to homogenisation, as Fr. Kappen kept saying.

I always wonder why Gandhi chose Nehru as his successor. Nehru was a great man but he had serious differences with Gandhi. In fact,

there are only two ideologies in India - Nehruism and Gandhism. There is no Marxism in India. All the Marxists are essentially Nehruites, though they do not want to show it. Whenever the Marxists have their international conference in Kerala, a great traditional and beautiful place, they have only the portraits of Lenin, Stalin and Marx and not of Ezhuthachan without whom there is no Malayalam language. He was really a man of the masses. The Marxists could ignore him because Marxism is essentially Eurocentric just as Nehruism is. Nehru is emotionally hostile to Europe, but intellectually servile, whereas Gandhi was intellectually hostile to Europe, and emotionally one with it. Gandhi had no emotional problems with Europe. To him Europeans were also human beings like us, who live, suffer, love, and die just as we do and therefore there was no question of emotional hostility. Some of his close associates were Jews, and Christians. Intellectually he might have differed with them but emotionally there were no problems. But Nehru, Subash Chandra Bose, and most other Indian leaders were emotionally hostile and intellectually servile to Europe. They could not think in any other way. Since Gandhi was leading a national upsurge they went along with it. Nehru even wove a saree with his own hands; the saree now worn by his grandson's daughter. It has been preserved. This may seem a mere ritual, but we have to note that some memory is thus preserved. Nehru must have woven the saree in prison - that he chose to weave a saree is important. Gandhi, then, might have chosen Nehru because he felt that Nehru was emotionally a rich soul and hence would not sell India completely away to Modernity. Most probably he was a better carrier of the tension of Modernity and Tradition than the others. If we had chosen or rejected modernity outright, I think India would have rebelled against such a situation. There was no way we could reject modernity altogether. We had to accept it because a certain kind of creativity was possible only when there was a transaction between Modernity and Tradition. Europe was the "other" and was necessary, I think, for making India creative again. But to what extent shall we embrace Modernity? That is the question to be faced now. In a way the choice of Nehru was inevitable then.

Further, there is the question of development. We all believed that this basically European concept would ensure better jobs for the poor

people since the use of science and technology would help build new dams and new factories and create more jobs. Gandhi, however, rejected it as he had his own ideas regarding employment and education for the Indian masses. Even Kamaraj did not agree with Gandhi because if the masses were to be educated in the traditional way the caste system could not be ended. Even if a Carpenter's son attains a B.E. degree in carpentry, he will remain a carpenter and the caste system will remain as rigid. So we have had to mix things up, welcome modernity and modern education. Equality and social justice have similarly become our goal. All this seemed obvious and inevitable at that time, but now I think it was not really all that inevitable. I think a genuine counter-culture ought to think of means by which the alternatives that are offered to us are seen to be not the only alternatives. Inspired by figures like Fr. Kappen we are in search now of precisely the genuine alternatives. Even if there was some sincerity in the notion of development, we find that even in Europe development of the sort Trueman wanted is no longer possible. In America and Germany no factory can be opened where the people conscious of environmental issues oppose it. Hence all the dirty factories find their way into the under-developed countries, and this process is honoured by the name of 'globalisation'. Development has thus evolved into globalisation. The tragedy is that the latter does not have an iota of idealism attached to it - the idealism that 'development' had originally.

Let me here introspect and indulge in a bit of self-criticism. In our hostility to tradition, because it was unbearable for most of us, we wanted to get away from our villages. I myself wanted to get away from my caste, from the values and notions of my relations. I married outside my caste. I got English education, Finally I had to go back to Kannada. This is what Manu was talking about referring to all these tensions. But anyone of the extremes would have taken me nowhere if I had become completely modern. I would have become totally uncreative. But by marrying outside my caste I find I cannot live in any area like Jayanagar where most of the Hindus live. I begin to live in the Cantonment area. I speak only English and begin to move with people who have no caste. This is a handicap because a lot of our culture is carried through caste. Caste is the basis of a lot

of our culture. A lot of our food habits are based on caste. There are so many things that caste carries. But when you rebel, against your caste you become modernised. You may also reach a point where you have to be an IAS officer only. I mean you have to go so far in education and live away from your people, speak a different kind of language and get a totally different identity. The alternative to this is to live and marry within your own caste. Then you have no experience at all of living outside a small circle. Neither tradition nor modernity has any solution for it. One has to constantly search for radical action against caste and other traditional notions just as Fr. Kappen did. But, all the time, we have to keep alive our sense of the sacred because without it we are lost. This is to be borne in mind while fighting globalisation. Mr. Mathews was there at the huge meeting at Mangalore against Cogentrix where fisherwomen had also come. You have to be inspired by a sense of the sacred, of the simple life in order to be able to fight for life against, say, Cogentrix. Otherwise you can't. And we get this sense of the sacred from Tradition. Traditional ways of living are still ways by which one can keep oneself alive.

There is an interesting tale about ragi and rice in Kannada. Ragi, you know, does not need much rain to grow, whereas rice needs a lot of rain. The rich eat rice and the poor ragi. This tale is drawn from Kanakadasa, one of our Bhakti poets. It appears ragi and rice once had a quarrel. Rice told ragi, "You are good for nothing. Nobody uses you as a mantrakshata. In a wedding you are not used, nor are you used in death. You are useless., I, rice, am used in everything". Ragi was very angry and took the case to Sri Ramachandra, who called all the sages, heard the quarrel and then said, "I will put both of you in prison for six months". So they were imprisoned for six months. When they came out, rice was moulded and could not be used, whereas ragi was still fresh. Ragi was very pleased with Rama who got the name Raghava because he was on the side of ragi. I narrate this parable only to demonstrate that India had in the past a creative mind, a mind that could be critical of itself. It didn't mean that if you were traditional you had to accept everything in your tradition. One could quarrel with tradition as Basava and Tukaram did. The internal quarrel would result in the evolution of something

new. Today when we are fighting globalisation we tend to become more and more traditional. People look at me now and remark. "Oh, Anantha Murthy who used to be so much against religion has now become very religious". I do not know what the truth is, but I believe I have always had a sense of the sacred. Let me finish on this note. My daughter, as often in the past, picked up an argument with me over this just the other day. There is a place called Pajaka in Udupi where Madhavacharya , the 13th century Dwaita philosopher was born. Just as in Kalady, the birth place of Sankara, you find nothing to remind you of the great man. In Pajaka people have been quarrying for the past 15 years. It is a rocky place, Pajaka, with some lovely hills some of which have temples built on them. Ironically, one of the Matthas has given permission for quarrying. I was shocked. As a child I grew up with the philosophy of Madhwa though I have been very critical of him in my novels. People used to discuss Madhwa's philosophy in my presence and one thing that struck me about Madhwa was that he was alone among the Indian philosophers, who said that the world which was transitory was also real. Probably there was the influence of Christianity also. By the 13th century this was contested. There is only one god - Vishnu. Like Christianity, there is only one god though Christians also have a hegemonic view of angels and archangels, high and low. If you read Milton you can see how the gods are graded. Madhwacharya took the world as real and argued that 'Satyam Jagath'. Man is human, and so is different from God. Bhakti is the only relation, not Jnana. So it says. This is radically different from Advaita. Anyway, after returning from Pajaka, I found I would get no sleep. I wondered how Madhva got the idea " Satyam Jagath". Because you know, the rocks have always been there and will always be there. There are so many stories of young Madhwacharya running around those hills. There is even a story that he held on to the tail of a calf and went wherever the calf went. What happens is, when you are a Bhakta, the supernatural takes over. The supernatural which was born from natural now becomes something in itself and you do not even respond to the fact that this boy must have seen those stones that subsequently have been destroyed. These stones must have taught him something. Wordsworth, you may know, shows how nature produces your consciousness. It is one of the producers of the hu-

man consciousness. Feeling restless about the quarrying operation, I wrote a letter to the DC . Now there is a movement afoot to save the hills which is visited mostly by people who do not wear shirts, in contrast with whom I feel suddenly modern. This relationship matters. However if somebody perform the Madhawa philosophy in front of me I would quarrel with him because I cannot think of Shankaracharya as a demon. Though I have no sympathy for some of Madhwa's theories I revere him. Action today against globalisation and commercialisation is possible if you can recover your sense of the sacred in the tradition, without at the same time losing your critical sense, your sense of what is wrong in the tradition. You have to keep the two together, though you may be forced at certain moments to appear to have become very traditional, or completely modern. One should not worry about what people say. You will have to show what you are through your actions and have that realised slowly. It is imperative for us to recover this sense of the sacred, and, at the same time, keep a critical outlook, remaining thus a "critical insider" and not allow us to be guided by the globalised knowledge which may seem important to Indians but which will destroy us eventually. When we met in Mangalore I was happy that Mr. Mathews, a legal expert, Mr. Sharma, a scientist and yatis from the Udupi Matha had all come together forging a common cause. The yatis walked barefoot as their wooden sandals would not allow them to walk long distances. I went with them. I was deeply moved to see all these young Swamis come there with all the shudras the Harijans and the Muslims. And they were there on the platform - intellectuals, yatis, Christian fathers and fisherwomen. And they were all against globalisation. I thought then that there was some hope of a new consciousness emerging where the intellectuals are not apart from the masses, where Gandhi once again will become meaningful. Although I must say, that Gandhism has failed in India just as Marxism failed in Russia. No longer is Gandhism in practice in India. Perhaps the best in Marxism is still alive for Marx was undoubtedly a great visionary. He was the first one to point out how production can becomes a mere commodity production. Those were the days when the railway lines were a big craze with the Europeans, and Marx immediately saw the potential for creating 'markets'. And Gandhi offers us a useful insight with regard to the way in which

we have to deal with tradition, what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected. Prof. A.B. Shaw once told me a story. It seems Gandhi asked Tarkathirta, a great Maharashtrian writer, about his argument with the Banaras Pandits. Gandhi had asked them if the Vaidika tradition sanctioned untouchability. The Pandits replied in the negative because for the Vaidika tradition the world is one and we all belong to the same God. One can even invoke the Vedas to prove that there is no sanction for untouchability. Noblest principles and dirty practice seem to go together. Yet the Banaras Pandits said , that it was all universal. Tarkathirtha , who was a Sanskrit scholar, then said that one could argue plausibly that the Vedas sanctioned untouchability. To which Gandhi characteristically replied that he would have to oppose Hinduism on this count. If you oppose you must juxtapose. Because your sense of the sacred makes you think that this religion is wrong. It is this that is of vital importance to us today, at the end of this century. This is what we are going to look for in our economic development, political development, and our literary and cultural heroes will be Allamma, Blake, Tolstoy. We have a great past that is our chief source of strength. A book like "**Tradition Modernity Counterculture**" has set me thinking along these lines. People like Fr. Kappen are deeply relevant to our times. Thank you for the patient listening.

Anantha Murthy



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